JANE CABLE

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

Homeward Bound.

Early in March a great transport sailed from Manila bay, laden with sick and disabled soldiers—the lame, the healthless and the mad. It was not a merry shipload, although hundreds were rejoicing in the escape from the hardships of life in the islands. Graydon Bansemer was among them, weak and distrustful of his own future—albeit a medal of honor and the prospect of an excellent position were ahead of him. His discharge was assured. He had served his country briefly, but well, and he was not loath to rest on his insignificant laurels and to respect the memory of the impulse which had driven him into service. In his heart he felt that time would make him as strong as ever, despite the ugly scar in his side. It was a question with him, however, whether time could revive the ambition that had been smothered during the first days of despair. He looked ahead with keen inquiry, speculating on the uncertain whirl of fortune's wheel.

Jane was obduracy itself in respect to his pleadings. A certain light in her eyes had, at last, brought conviction to his soul. He began to fear—with a mighty pain—that she would not retreat from the stand she had taken.

She went on board with Mrs. Harbin and Ethel. There were other wives on board who had found temporary release from irksome but voluntary enlistment. Jane's resignation from the Red Cross society deprived her of the privileges which would have permitted her to see much of Graydon. They were kept separated by the transport's regulations; he was a common soldier, she of the officers' mess. The restrictions were cruel and relentless. They saw but little of one another during the thirty days; but their thoughts were busy with the days to come. Graydon grew stronger and more confident as the ship forged nearer to the Golden Gate; Jane more wistful and resigned to the new purpose which was to give life another coloring, if possible. They were but one day out from San Francisco when he found the opportunity to converse with her as she passed through the quarters of the luckless ones.

"Jane, I won't take no for an answer this time," he whispered eagerly; "you must consent. Do you want to ruin both of our lives?"

"Why will you persist, Graydon? You know I cannot——"

"You can. Consider me as well as yourself. I want you. Isn't that enough? You can't ask for more love than I will give. Tomorrow we'll be on shore. I have many things to do before I am at liberty to go my way. Won't you wait for me? It won't be long. We can be married in San Francisco. Mr. and Mrs. Cable are to meet you. Tell them, dearest, that you want to go home with me. The home won't be in Chicago; but it will be home just the same."

"Dear Graydon, I am sorry—I am heartsick. But I cannot—I dare not."

Graydon Bansemer was a man as well as a lover. He gave utterance to a perfectly man-like expression, coming from the bottom of his tried soul:

"It's damned nonsense, Jane!" He said it so feelingly that she smiled even as she shook her head and moved away. "I'll see you tomorrow on shore?" he called, repentant and anxious.

"Yes!"

The next day they landed. Graydon waved an anxious farewell to her as he was hurried off with the lame, the halt and the blind. He saw David Cable and his wife on the pier and, in spite of himself, he could not repel an eager, half-fearful glance through the crowd of faces. Although he did not expect his father to meet him, he dreaded the thought that he might be there, after all. To his surprise, as he stood waiting with his comrades, he saw David Cable turn suddenly, and, after a moment's hesitation, wave his hand to him, the utmost friendship in his now haggard face. His heart thumped joyously at this sign of amity.

As the soldiers moved away, Cable paused and looked after him, a grim though compassionate expression in his eyes. He and Jane were ready to confront the customs officers.

"I wonder if he knows about his father," mused he. Jane caught her breath and looked at him with something like terror in her eyes. He abruptly changed the subject, deploring his lapse into the past from which they were trying to shield her.

The following morning Graydon received a note from Cable, a frank but carefully worded message, in which he was invited to take the trip East in the private car of the president of the Pacific, Lakes & Atlantic. Mrs. Cable joined her husband in the invitation; one of the sore spots in Graydon's conscience was healed by this exhibition of frankness. Moreover, Cable stated that his party would delay departure until Graydon's papers were passed upon and he was free from red tape restrictions.

The young man, on landing, sent telegrams to his father and Elias Droom, the latter having asked him to notify him as soon as he reached San Francisco. Graydon was not a little puzzled by the fact that the old clerk seemed strangely at variance with his father, in respect to the future. In both telegrams, he announced that he would start East as soon as possible.

There was a letter from Droom awaiting him at headquarters. It was brief, but it specifically urged him to accept the place proposed by Mr. Clegg, and reiterated his pressing command to the young man to stop for a few days in Chicago. In broad and characteristically uncouth sentences, he assured him that while the city held no grudge against him, and that the young men would welcome him with open arms—his groundless fears to the contrary—he would advise him to choose New York. There was one rather sentimental allusion to "old Broadway" and another to "Grennitch," as he wrote it. In conclusion, he asked him to come to the office, which was still in the U—— building, adding that if he wished to avoid the newspaper men he could find seclusion at the old rooms in Wells street. "Your father," he said, "has given up his apartment and has taken lodgings. I doubt very much if he will be willing to share them with you, in view of the position he has assumed in regard to your future; although he says you may always call upon him for pecuniary assistance." A draft for five hundred dollars was inclosed with the letter.

Graydon was relieved to find that there would be no irksome delay attending his official discharge. When he walked out a "free man," as he called it, a gentlemanly pension attorney locked arms with him and hung on like a leech, until the irritated soldier shook him off with less consideration than vigor.

He went directly to the Palace hotel, where he knew the Cables were stopping. David Cable came down in response to his card. The two men shook hands, each eyeing the other inquiringly for an instant.

"I want you to understand, Graydon, that I am your friend. Nothing has altered my esteem for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Cable. I hardly expected it."

"I don't see why, my boy. But we'll let all that pass. Mrs. Cable wants to see you."

"Before we go any farther I want to make myself clear to you. I still hope to marry Jane. She says she cannot become my wife. You understand why, sir. I only want to tell you that her objections are not objections to me. She is Jane and I love her, sir, because she is."

"I hope you can win her over, Graydon. She seems determined, however, and she is unhappy. You can't blame her, either. If there were base or common blood in her, it wouldn't make much difference to her pride. But she's made of other material. She's serious about it, and I am sensible enough to get her point of view. She wouldn't want to marry you with the prospect of an eternal shadow that neither of you could get off of your minds. I sometimes wish that I knew who were her parents."

"It doesn't matter, so far as I am concerned."

"I know, my boy, but she is thinking of the heritage that comes down from her mother to her. You'll never know how it hurt me to find that I had no daughter. It hurts her worse a thousandfold to learn that she has no mother. I trust it may not happen that you will lose her as a wife."

"If I really thought I couldn't win her, sir, it would ruin my ambition in life. She loves me, I'm sure."

"By the way, Clegg tells me he has offered you the New York office. It's a splendid chance for you. You will take it, of course."

"I expect to talk it over with Mr. Clegg when I get to Chicago."

"Come up to our apartments. Oh, pardon me, Graydon, I want to ask you if you have sufficient money to carry you through? I know the pay of a private is not great——"

"Thank you. I have saved nearly all of it. My father has sent me a draft for five hundred. I don't expect to use it, of course."

"Your father?" asked Cable, with a quick, searching look.

"And then I did save something in Chicago; strange as it may seem," said Bansemer, with a smile. "I have a few of your five per cents. I trust the road is all right?"

The Cables left San Francisco on the following day, accompanied by the Harbins and Graydon Bansemer. There was no mistaking the joy which lay ander restraint in the faces and attitude of the Cables. David Cable had grown younger and less gray, it seemed, and his wife was glowing with a new and subdued happiness. Graydon, sitting with the excited Ethel—who was rejoicing in the prospect of New York and the other young man—studied the faces of the three people who sat at the other end of the coach.

Time had wrought its penalties. Cable was thin and his face had lost its virility, but not its power. His eyes never left the face of Jane, who was talking in an earnest, impassioned manner, as was her wont in these days. Frances Cable's face was a study in transition. She had lost the color and vivacity of a year ago, although the change was not apparent to the casual observer. Graydon could see that she had suffered in many ways. The keen, eager appeal for appreciation was gone from her eyes; in its stead was the appeal for love and contentedness. Happiness, now struggling against the smarting of a sober pain, was giving a sweetness to her eyes that had been lost in the ambitious glitter of other days. Ethel bored him—a most unusual condition. He longed to be under the tender, quieting influences at the opposite end of the car. He even resented his temporary exile.

"Jane," Cable was saying with gentle insistence; "it is not just to him. He loves you and you are not doing the right thing by him."

"You'll find I am right in the end," she said stubbornly.

"I can't bear the thought of your going out as a trained nurse, dear," protested Frances Cable. "There is no necessity. You can have the best of homes and in any place you like. Why waste your life in——"

"Waste, mother? It would be wasting my life if I did not find an occupation for it. I can't be idle. I can't exist forever in your love and devotion."

"Good Lord, child, don't be foolish," exclaimed Cable. "That hurts me more than you think. Everything we have is yours."

"I'm sorry I said it, daddy. I did not mean it in that way. It isn't the money, you know, and it isn't the home, either. No, you must let me choose my own way of living the rest of my life. I came from a foundling hospital. A good and tender nurse found me there and gave me the happiest years of my life. I shall go back there and give the rest of my years to children who are less fortunate than I was. I want to help them, mother, just as you did—only it is different with me."

"You'll see it differently some day," said Mrs. Cable, earnestly.

"I don't object to your helping the foundlings, Jane," said Cable, "but I don't see why you have to be a nurse to do it. Other women support such causes and not as nurses, either. It's——"

"It's my way, daddy, that's all," she said firmly.

"Then, why, in the name of heaven, were you so unkind as to keep that poor boy over there alive when he might have died and ended his misery? You nursed him back to life only to give him a wound that cannot be healed. You would ruin his life, Jane. Is it fair? Damn me, I'm uncouth and hard in many ways—I had a hard, unkind beginning—but I really believe I've got more heart in me than you have."

"David!" exclaimed his wife. Jane looked at the exasperated man in surprise.

"Now, here's what I intend to do; you owe me something for the love that I give to you; you owe Graydon something for keeping him from dying. If you want to go into the nursing business, all right. But I'm going to demand some of your devotion for my own sake before that time comes. I've loved you all of your life——"

"And I've loved you, daddy," she gasped.

"And I'm going to ask you to begin your nursing career by attending to me. I'm sick for want of your love. I'm giving up business for the sake of enjoying it unrestrained. Your mother and I expect it. We are going abroad for our health and we are going to take you with us. Right now is where you begin your career as a nurse. You've got to begin by taking care of the love that is sick and miserable. We want it to live, my dear. Now, I want a direct decision—at once; will you take charge of two patients on a long-contemplated trip in search of love and rest—wages paid in advance?"

She looked at him, white-faced and stunned. He was putting it before her fluently and in a new light. She saw what it was that he considered that she owed to them—the love of a daughter, after all.

An hour later she stood with Graydon on the rear platform of the car. He was trying to talk calmly of the country through which they were rushing and she was looking pensively down the rails that slipped out behind them.

"We'll be in Chicago in three days," he remarked.

"Graydon, I have decided to go abroad for five or six months before starting upon my work. They want me so much, you see," she said, her voice a trifle uncertain.

"I wish I could have some power to persuade you," he said. Changing his tone to one of brisk interest, he went on. "It is right, dear. It will do you great good and it will be a joy to them. I'll miss you."

"And I shall miss you, Graydon," she said, her eyes very solemn and wistful.

"Won't you—won't you give me the promise I want, Jane?" he asked eagerly. She placed her hand upon his and shook her head.

"Won't you be good to me, Graydon? Don't make it so hard for me. Please, please don't tell me again that you love me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Wreckage.

The spring floods delayed the Eastern Express, bringing the party to Chicago nearly a day late. The Cables and the Harbins went at once to the Annex, where David Cable had taken rooms. They had given up their North Side home some months before, both he and his wife retiring into the seclusion that a great hotel can afford when necessary.

Graydon hurried off to his father's office, eager, yet half fearing to meet the man who was responsible for the broken link in his life—this odd year. He recalled, as he drove across town, that a full year had elapsed since he spent that unforgettable night in Elias Droom's uncanny home. Was he never to forget that night—that night when his soul seemed even more squalid than the home of the recluse?

All of his baggage, except a suit case, had been left at the station. He did not know what had become of his belongings in the former home of his father. Nor, for that matter, did he care.

At the U—— building he ventured a diffident greeting to the elevator boy, whom he remembered. The boy looked at him quizzically and nodded with customary aloofness. Graydon found himself hoping that he would not meet Bobby Rigby. He also wondered, as the car shot up, how his father had managed to escape from the meshes that were drawn about him on the eve of his departure. His chances had looked black and hopeless enough then; yet, he still maintained the same old offices in the building. His name was on the directory board downstairs. Graydon's heart gave a quick bound with the thought that his father had proved the charges false after all.

Elias Droom was busy directing the labors of two able-bodied men and a charwoman, all of whom were toiling as they had never toiled before. The woman was dusting law books and the men were packing them away in boxes. The front room of the suite was in a state of devastation. A dozen boxes stood about the floor; rugs and furniture were huddled in the most remote corner awaiting the arrival of the "second-hand man"; the floor was littered with paper. Droom was directing operations with a broken umbrella. It seemed like a lash to the toilers.

"Now, let's get through with this room," he was saying in his most impelling way. "The men will be here for the boxes at four. I don't want 'em to wait. This back room stuff we'll put in the trunks. Look out there! Don't you see that nail?"

Eddie Deever, with his usual indolence, was seated upon the edge of the writing table in the corner, smoking his cigarette, and commenting with rash freedom upon the efforts of the perspiring slaves.

"How long are you going to keep these things in the warehouse?" he asked of Droom.

"I'm not going to keep them there at all. They belong to Mr. Bansemer. He'll take them out when he has the time."

"He's getting all the time he wants now, I guess," commented Eddie. "Say, talking about time, I'll be twenty-one next Tuesday."

"Old enough to marry."

"I don't know about that. I'm getting pretty wise. Do you know, I've just found out how old Rosie Keating is? She's twenty-nine. Gee, it's funny how a fellow always gets stuck on a girl older than himself! Still, she's all right. I'm not saying a word against her. She wouldn't be twenty-nine if she could help it."

"I suppose it's off between you, then?"

"I don't know about that, either. We lunched at Rector's today. That don't look like it's off, does it? Four sixty-five, including the tip. She don't look twenty-nine, does she?"

"I've never noticed her."

"Never—well, holy mackerel! You must be blind then. She says she's seen you in the elevator a thousand times. Never noticed her? Gee!"

"I mean, I've never noticed any one who looked less than twenty-nine. By the way, do you ever see Mr. Rigby? I believe she is in his office."

"I don't go to Rigby's any more," said Eddie, with sudden stiffness. "He's a cheap skate."

"I heard he threw you out of the office one day," with a dry cackle.

"He did not! We couldn't agree in certain things regarding the Bansemer affair, that's all. I told him to go to the devil, or words to that effect."

"Something loose about your testimony, I believe, wasn't there?"

"Oh, the whole thing doesn't amount to a whoop. I'm trying to get Rosie another job. She oughtn't to write in there with that guy."

"Well, you're twenty-one. Why don't you open an office of your own? Your mother's got plenty of money. She can buy you a library and a sign, and that is all a young lawyer needs in Chicago."

"Mother wants me to run for alderman in our ward, next spring. I'll be able to vote at that election."

"You've got as much right in the council as some others, I suppose."

"Sure, mother owns property. The West Side ought to be as well represented as the North Side. Property interests is what we need in the council. That's——"

"I don't care to hear a political speech, boy. Are you busy this afternoon?"

"No. I wouldn't be here if I was."

"Then get up there and hand those books down to me. Nobody loafs in this office today."

"Well, doggone, if that isn't the limit! All right. Don't get mad. I'll do it." The young gentleman leisurely ascended to the top of the stepladder and fell into line under the lash.

"Young Mr. Graydon Bansemer will be here this afternoon," said Droom. "I want to get things cleaned up a bit beforehand."

"How does he feel about his father?"

"He doesn't know about him, I'm afraid."

"Gee! Well, it'll jar him a bit, won't it?"

The office door was opened suddenly and a tall young man strode into the room, only to stop aghast at the sight before him. Droom's lank figure swayed uncertainly and his eyes wavered.

"What's all this?" cried Graydon, dropping his bag and coming toward the old man, his hand outstretched. Droom's clammy fingers rested lifelessly in the warm clasp.

"How are you, Graydon? I'm—I'm very glad to see you. You are looking well. Oh, this? We—we are moving," said the old man. The helpers looked on with interest. "Come into the back office. It isn't so torn up. I didn't expect you so soon. They said it was twenty-four hours late. Well, well, how are you, my boy?"

"I'm quite well again, Elias. Hard siege of it, I tell you. Moving, eh? What's that for?"

"Never mind those books, Eddie. Thank you for helping me. Come in some other time. You fellows—I mean you—pack the rest of these and then I'll tell you what to do next. Come in, Graydon."

Eddie Deever took his departure, deeply insulted because he had not been introduced to the newcomer. Graydon, somewhat bewildered, followed Droom into his father's consultation room. He looked around inquiringly.

"Where is father? I telegraphed him."

An incomprehensible grin came into Droom's face. He twirled the umbrella in his fingers a moment before replying. His glance at the closed door was no more significant than his lowered tones.

"It didn't go well with him, Graydon. He isn't here any more."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the trial. There was a trial, you see. Haven't you heard anything?"

"Trial? He—he was arrested?" came numbly from the young man's lips.

"I can't mince matters, Graydon. I'll get it over as quickly as possible. Your father was tried for blackmail and was convicted. He is in—he's in the penitentiary."

The son's face became absolutely bloodless; his eyes were full of comprehension and horror, and his body stiffened as if he were turning to stone. The word penitentiary fell slowly, mechanically from his lips. He looked into Droom's eyes, hoping it might be a joke of the calloused old clerk.

"You—it—it can't be true," he murmured, his trembling hands going to his temples.

"Yes, my boy, it is true. I didn't write to you about it, because I wanted to put it off as long as I could. It's for five years."

"God!" burst from the wretched son. A wave of shame and grief sent the tears flooding to his eyes. "Poor old dad!" He turned and walked to the window, his shoulders heaving. Droom stood silent for a long time, watching Bansemer's son, pity and triumph in his face.

"Do you want to hear about it?" he asked at last. Graydon's head was bent in assent.

"It came the day after you left Chicago with the recruits. I knew you would not read the newspapers. So did he. Harbert swore out the papers and he was arrested here in this office. I believe he would have killed himself if he had been given time. His revolver was—er—not loaded. Before the officers came he discharged me. I was at liberty to go or to testify against him. I did neither. Of course, I was arrested, but they could only prove that I was a clerk who knew absolutely nothing about the inside workings of the office. I offered to go on his bond, but he would not have me. He made some arrangement, through his attorney, and bail was secured. In spite of the fact that he was charged with crime, he insisted on keeping these offices and trying to do business. It wasn't because he needed money, Graydon, but because he wanted to lead an honest life, he said. He has a great deal of money, let me tell you. The grand jury did not come up until last month—nearly a year later—so swift is justice in this city. In the meantime, I saw but little of him. I was working on an invention and, besides, there were detectives watching every movement I made. I stuck close to my rooms. By the way, I want to show you a couple of models I have perfected. Don't let me forget it. They——"

"Yes, yes—but father? Go on!"

"Well, the trial came up at last. That man Harbert is a devil. He had twenty witnesses, any one of whom could have convicted your father. How he got onto them, I can't imagine. He uncovered every deal we've—er—he had in Chicago and——"

"Then he really was guilty!" groaned Graydon.

"Yes, my boy, I knew it, of course. They could not force me to testify against him, however. I was too smart for them. Well, to make it short, he was sentenced five weeks ago. The motion for a new trial was overruled. He went to Joliet. If he had been a popular alderman or ward boss he would have been out yet on continuances, spending most of his sentence in some fashionable hotel, to say the least."

"Is he—wearing the stripes?"

"Yes, it's the fashion there."

"For God's sake, don't jest. For five years?" The young man sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"There'll be something off for good behavior, my boy. He wanted to behave well before he went there, so I suppose he'll keep it up. The whole town was against him. He didn't have a friend."

"How did you escape?" demanded Graydon, looking up suddenly. "State's evidence?"

"No, not even after he tried to put most of the blame upon me. He tried that, my boy. I just let him talk. It saved me from prison. Usually the case with the man who keeps his mouth closed."

"But, Elias—Elias, why have I been kept in the dark? Why did he not tell me about it? Why has——"

"You forget, Graydon, that you turned from him first. You were really the first to condemn him. He wanted you to stay away from this country until he is free. That was his plan. He didn't want to see you. Now he wants you to come to him. He wants you to bring Jane Cable to see him."

"What!"

"Yes, that's it. I believe he intends to tell her the names of her father and mother. I think he wants her to forgive him and he wants her to hear both of you say it to him."

Graydon stared blankly from the window. The old clerk was smiling to himself, an evil, gloating smile that would have shocked Bansemer had he turned suddenly.

"He wants both of us to—to come to the penitentiary?" muttered the son.

"Yes, as soon as possible. Do you think she'll go?" demanded Droom anxiously.

"I don't know. I'm afraid not."

"Not even to learn who her parents are?"

"It might tempt her. But she hates father."

"Well, she can gloat over him, can't she? That ought to be some satisfaction. Talk it over with her. She's here, isn't she?"

"Elias, do you know who her parents were?" asked Graydon quickly. "I've thought you knew as much about it as father."

The old man's eyes shifted.

"It's a silly question to ask of me. I was not a member of the Four Hundred, my boy."

"Nor was my father. Yet you think he knows."

"He's a much smarter man than I Graydon. You'll go with me to see him?"

"Yes. I can't speak for Miss Cable."

"See her tomorrow. Come out to my place tonight, where the reporters can't find you. Maybe you won't care to sleep with me—I've but one bed, you see—but you can go to a quiet hotel downtown. I'm packing these things to store them for your father. Then I'm going back to New York to live on my income. It's honest money, too."

"Who sent me the draft for five hundred?"

"I did, Graydon. Forgive me. It was a loan, you know. I thought you'd need something——"

"I haven't touched it, Elias. Here it is. Thank you. No, I won't accept it."

"I'm sorry," muttered the old man, taking the slip of paper.

Graydon resumed his seat near the window and watched Droom with leaden eyes as he turned suddenly to resume charge of the packing. "We'll soon be through," he said shortly.

For an hour the work went on, and then Droom dismissed the workers with their pay. The storage van men were there to carry to boxes away. Graydon sat still and saw the offices divested. Secondhand dealers hurried off with the furniture, the pictures and the rugs; an expressman came in for the things that belonged to Elias Droom.

"There," said the clerk, tossing the umbrella into a corner, "it's finished. There's nothing left to do but remove ourselves."

Mr. Elias, did Mr. Clegg know about father's conviction when he offered me the place in New York?" asked Graydon as they started away.

"Yes, that's the beauty of it. He admires you. You'll take the place?"

"Not until I've talked it all over with him—tomorrow."

Droom called a cab and the two drove over to the Wells street rooms, Graydon relinquishing himself completely to the will of the old man. During the supper, which Droom prepared with elaborate care, and far into the night, the young man sat and listened without interest to the garrulous talk of his host, who explained the mechanism and purpose of two models.

One was in the nature of a guillotine by which a person could chop his own head off neatly without chance of failure, and the other had to do with the improvement of science in respect to shoelaces.

(To be continued.)